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SUBSTITUTE SPECIFICATION

TECHNICAL FIELD

BACKGROUND ART

[0003] Such logistics systems, explained in detail later with reference to Fig. 9, suffer from the following problems:

[0004] As a result, the problems arise that independent development work and investment become necessary and the operating costs of the logistics systems end up being increased. This gives rise to the waste of duplicate development and investment when

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[0007] Still further, there is the disadvantage that when various changes or modifications occur in business processes within that group, the risk would arise of repeat development and investment being

[0008] Further, viewing the above (i) and (ii) together, there is also the critical problem that the system structure, which inherently suffers from the defect of requiring that each change be dealt with and adjustments made in the operation of the business system for each logistics system when the above changes and modifications occur, ends up becoming even more enormous.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

[0010] Therefore, the present inventors engaged in in-depth research and as a result obtained the idea of going beyond the framework of individual companies, businesses, etc. or going beyond even the framework of groups, assembling these into a single economy, forming a single demand information layer as a whole and a single supply information layer as a whole as information integration layers, and thereby integrating into one transportation layer and constructing a single logistics system comprised of these layers integrated into one for the economy as a whole, and thereby completed the present invention.

[0011] That is, the present invention, in consideration of the above problems, has as its object to form a single demand information layer common to the economy as a whole, a similar single supply information layer, and a similar single integrated transportation layer and thereby construct a single integrated logistics system for customers and economic entities as a whole.

[0012] To achieve the above object, the present invention provides a logistics system for realizing a highly efficient, waste-free flow of saleable items in an economy comprised of users and customers. This logistics system is constructed from a demand information layer (12) which receives as input requests for saleable items from customers (15) and generates integrated demand information, a supply information layer (13) which receives as input this integrated demand information and generates integrated supply information for economic entities making up a business process relating to the supply of the saleable items relating to the requests from the customers (15), and an integrated transportation layer (14) which receives as input the integrated supply information, generates integrated transportation information relating to the saleable items, and integrately executes the physical transportation of the saleable items within the economy (10).

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0013] Fig. 1 is a view of the principle of a logistics system according to the present invention;

[0014] Fig. 2 is a view of the basic configuration for realizing the principle shown in Fig. 1;

[0015] Fig. 3 is a view of a demanding system (DS) of Fig. 2;

[0016] Fig. 4 is a view of a supplying system (SS) of Fig. 2;

[0017] Fig. 5 is a view of a transporting system (TS) of Fig. 2;

[0018] Fig. 6 is a view of an embodiment for specifically realizing the basic configuration shown in Fig. 2;

[0019] Fig. 7 is a view capturing the embodiment of the present invention from its virtual aspects;

[0020] Fig. 8 is a view capturing the embodiment of the present invention from its practical aspects; and

[0021] Fig. 9 is a view summarizing a conventional logistics system.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

[0022] To clarify the effects of the present invention, first a conventional logistics system will be explained.

[0023] Fig. 9 is a view summarizing a conventional logistics system.

[0024] In this figure, reference numeral 1 indicates a logistics system (LS). In the figure, as one example, as the LS's of individual companies, individual businesses, or individual saleable items, the first, second, ... n-th logistics systems LS1, LS2, and LSn are shown.

[0025] The logistics systems 1 basically have substantially the same configurations. Explaining the logistics system (LS2) 1 as a typical example, in the LS2, there is a communication platform (CP) CP2 at the center. Management mechanisms DS21 (demanding system), SS21 (supplying system), TS21 (transporting system), ... DS2n, SS2n, and TS2n function in accordance with the demand information relating to the saleable items input from the customers connected to the CP2. That is, in the LS2, products are produced and shipped out

by the "just in time" system in small lots on the optimal factory lines in response to the customer requests. The saleable items are loaded on a large number of trucks or other vehicles and delivered between the factories and warehouses and consuming areas. Note that for space reasons in the figure, the management mechanisms 4 are shown for only the LS2, but there are similarly a DS11, SS11, TS11, ... DS1n, SS1n, and TS1n for LS1 and a DS1n, SS1n, TS1n, ... DSnn, SSnn, and TSnn for LSn.

[0026] To optimize the flow of saleable items in these management mechanisms 4, that is, to transfer saleable items by the lowest operation and management costs and the greatest effectiveness and efficiency, managing systems (MS) 3 built around computers are provided as MS21, ..., MS2n. MS21, ..., MS2n find the optimal solutions for the flow of saleable items in accordance with the request information input from the customers through the communication platform CP2 using the computers and cause the management mechanisms 4, that is, the DS21, SS21, TS21 ... DS2n, SS2n, and TS2n to function.

[0027] Giving a specific example, if LS2 is a logistics system of a business handling soft drinks, MS21 for example has jurisdiction over the business process of PET bottled mineral water, while MS2n has jurisdiction over the business process of for example canned coffee beverages.

[0028] According to the logistics system (LS) 1 shown in Fig. 9, the various problems explained in detail in the "BACKGROUND ART" arise. The present invention for solving these problems will be explained in detail below.

[0029] Fig. 1 is a view of the principle of a logistics system according to the present invention.

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[0034] The integrated transportation layer 14 receives as input the integrated supply information, generates integrated transportation information relating to the saleable items, and executes the physical transportation of the saleable items integratedly in the economy 10. The logistics system 11 of the present invention is in principle comprised

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

[0044] Further, the integrated management system (IMS) 26, on a single enterprise basis, manages the supply chain management system (SCM) 24 and transportation management system (TS) 25 to optimize the flow of saleable items.

[0045] The logistics system (LS) 11 of the present invention shares and standardizes the DS 21 and SS 22 in the overall economy made up of the customers and economic entities. Therefore, the TS 23 is also shared and standardized in the economy as a whole.

[0046] The logistics system (LS) 11 of the present invention shown in Fig. 2 differs greatly from the logistics system in the above-mentioned shipping industry as illustrated below.

[0047] Fig. 3 is a view of the demanding system (DS) of Fig. 2,

[0048] Fig. 4 is a view of the supplying system (SS) of Fig. 2, and

[0049] Fig. 5 is a view of the transporting system (TS) of Fig. 2. All are drawn schematically.

[0050] First, referring to Fig. 3, the economy 10 is divided into a customer 15 domain and a company or business or other economy entity 2 domain. The economic entity 2 domain is divided into a plurality of stages along the flow of requests or the flow of saleable items. Each stage forms an economic body (EB) 31 to 34. Note that a customer 15 is also considered as an economic body (EB customer) 35.

[0051] The economic body (EB) 31 is for example a supplier (EB supplier) providing raw materials for the saleable items,

[0052] the EB 32 is a manufacturer (EB maker) producing goods or services based on the raw materials,

[0053] the EB 33 is a wholesaler (EB wholesaler) of the produced goods or services, and

[0054] the EB 34 is a retailer/outlet (EB retailer) of the goods or services. Note that while not shown, there are also economic bodies executing transportation, for example, shippers or warehousemen.

[0056] The DS receives as input the request information from customers and outputs demand information.

[0058] The SS receives as input the demand information and outputs the supply information.

[0060] Note that in Fig. 5, the arrows from the right to the left indicate not the flow of transportation of finished products to the customers, but the flow of returned goods, recycled goods, reclaimed goods, and pallets and other transport materials.

[0062] Here, the suppliers such as manufacturers of raw materials and packing materials are themselves EBmak in view of the functions of production. There

1. The first step is to identify the problem. This involves understanding the symptoms and the context in which they are occurring.

1. The first step in the process of creating a new product is to identify a market need. This involves conducting market research to understand the preferences and behaviors of potential customers.

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[0069] Note that in the above example, the explanation was given using certain goods as the saleable items, but the present logistics system can also be applied to goods, services, and information including money and knowledge as saleable items. For example, it can be applied to the flow of money, that is, the business process of billing and settlements.

[0071] In this figure, reference numeral 41 represents an integrated platform (MPCP: multiparty communication platform), 42 a process connection agent (PCA), and 26 integrated management systems (IMS1, IMS2, IMSn). The communication platforms (CP) 2, economic bodies (EB), demanding systems (DS), supplying systems (SS), and transporting systems (TS) are the same as explained above.

[0073] Therefore, the logistics system 11 according to this embodiment of the present invention is a

logistics system applied to the flow of saleable items 36 in an economy 10 comprised of customers 15 and economic entities 2,

[0074] characterized by forming a standardized integrated communication platform (MPCP) 41 in the economy 10 and, on a single enterprize basis, managing the customers and economic entities.

[0075] Further, the platform 41 is provided with a process connection agent 42. The process connection agent 42 can connect with economic bodies for the flow of information relating to saleable items.

[0076] Note that the "platform" spoken of here means standardized media of the Internet, EDI, telephone, facsimile, i-mode communications, data, audio, and display communications and includes platforms in the sense ordinarily used in general computer systems. Specifically, it includes hardware forming the basis of the computer system and OS's (operating systems) for operation of computers. The process connection agent 42 built into the platform 41 works as main function of this embodiment. Note that the process connection agent 42 may also be configured connected to the platform 41.

[0077] The process connection agent 42 has or connects

(i) a supply chain management system (MSC) 24 interposed between the demanding system (DS) 21 for converting requests issued by customers 15 for saleable items 36 to the demand information and the supplying system (SS) 22 for converting the demand information to supply information and centrally managing the demanding system and the supplying system and

(ii) a transportation management system (MT) 25 interposed between the transporting system (TS) 23 for

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converting the supply information to transportation information and executing the physical transportation of the saleable items 36 and the supplying system (SS) 22 and, on a single enterprize basis, managing the supplying system and transporting system. Note that in Fig. 6, the MSC 24 and MT 25 are not shown.

[0078] Here, the process connection agent 42 has or connects integrated management systems (IMS) 26 for, on a single enterprize basis, managing the above supply chain management system (i) and the above transportation management system (ii) and optimizing the flow of saleable items.

[0079] In this case, the characteristic feature of this embodiment is the optimization of the flow of saleable items for each business process by the integrated management systems. These are the IMS1, IMS2, ..., IMSn shown in Fig. 6.

[0080] Giving a specific example, the above business processes include at least one of a sales plan control process, shipment projection control process, transportation control process, production control process, purchase control process, incoming order control process, outgoing order control process, inventory control process, delivery center and warehouse control process, distribution processing control process, shipping control process, cargo information control process, ordered saleable item information control process, product control process, and sales performance control process. For example, the IMS1 (consumption control process) to IMS9 (shipping control process) are working at the same time as the integrated management system (IMS) 26. These business processes are however illustrations. It is possible to freely include original business processes for each economic entity 2.

[0082] Therefore, according to the present embodiment, it is possible to give rise to a new management function featuring an effectiveness and efficiency not seen in the past. This is given rise to first by integrating the MS11, MS1n, ..., MSn1, MSnn shown in Fig. 9.

[0084] Giving one example, assuming the economic entities A to G have as essential business processes the above inventory control process and warehouse control process, it is possible to make mutual use of them or consolidate or discard them by merger or linkage of the inventory control processes of the economic entities A to D and the warehouse control processes of the economic entities E to G in accordance with need and therefore give rise to a more efficient, waste-free inventory and warehouse control process.

[0086] That is, the customers and economic entities 2 can connect to the process connection agent 42 in

any way. Further, they can be disconnected from the process connection agent 42 in any way. In the logistics system 11, connection/disconnection to the economic bodies becomes possible. Note that the process connection agent 42 is connected to the shared integrated communication platform 41 and can transfer information relating to the saleable items with the economic bodies connected to the same. The platform may be connected to by a dedicated line or by the electronic communications network as of the Internet. According to the latter, that is, the Internet, the above connection/disconnection is extremely easy. Therefore, the customers and economic entities can connect by images such as inserting a plug into the platform 41 and conversely can disconnect by images such as pulling out a plug.

[0087] When viewing the above embodiment (Fig. 6) as a whole, the following can be said.

[0088] Sharing of the knowledge, knowhow, software, and other "optimization and streamlining tools", goods, services, and information, that is, "saleable items", and vehicles, trucks, ships, aircraft, containers, pallets, cartons, warehouses, conveyors, etc., that is, "transporting means", and "communication platforms (EDI networks, Internet, VAN, facsimiles, telephones, i-mode, etc.)" owned by the various companies, businesses, etc. by the related companies, businesses, and other economic entities by pooling of information leads to realization of further efficiency. The present invention is realized specifically by an integrated communication platform (MPCP) 41 which is able to easily connect or disconnect and integratedly operate with logistics elements of individual companies and businesses, that is, their (1) transporting means, (2) optimization and

FIG. 6

[0089] The integrated platform 41, as mentioned above, enables integration of a plurality of conventionally separate LS's over a wide range and to a high performance by the inclusion of a process connection agent 42 serving as a location for linking the individual companies and businesses. Here, the integrated platform 41 integrates communication of overall information, integrates the IMS's 43, and places them under its control so as to centrally manage information relating to saleable items and optimizes the flow of saleable items so as to enable changes in the logistics environment to be swiftly handled. A logistics system having an integrated platform 41 and process connection agent 42 in this way is called a "multi party logistics system" (MPLS).

[0091] Fig. 7 is a view capturing the embodiment of the present invention from its virtual aspects.

[0093] Note that the reference numerals and symbols used in Fig. 7 and Fig. 8 represent the same elements as those used in Fig. 2 and Fig. 6 etc.

[0095] In reality, however, as shown in Fig. 8, the demanding systems (DS), supplying systems (SS), and transport systems (TS) of the individual companies or

businesses are all operated integratedly on the MPLS 45.

[0096] In the final analysis, the individual companies or individual businesses etc. appear to operate their LS's individually, but in reality the logistics system of the present invention operates all LS's in a manner integrating all of the companies and businesses.

[0097] When considering the advantages inherent to the present embodiment with reference to Fig. 7 and Fig. 8, the following can be said.

[0098] Since it is a virtual reality process provided by the MPLS 45, the process of transaction in business processes for an economic entity 2 is the same as in the past where a terminal connected to the CP of the local system connected to the MPCP 41 was simply accessed. In practice, however, the business process is one in which outgoing order processing, incoming order processing, shipment instructions, demand and supply management, replenishment loading, operation instructions, checking, billing, payment, cargo tracking, inquiry processing and other work and further the framework and tools for optimization and streamlining in the planning, for example, shipment projections, short cycle demand-supply management, continuous automatic replenishment, controlling desirable inventory, simple networking, new product management, product closing management, integrated transportation arrangement system, global cross docking, etc. and communications infrastructure, personnel (operations, storage, and management), and other logistic elements are all processed, on a single enterprize basis, all together in a manner shared by all economic entities.

[0099] In a business process utilizing the MPLS 45,

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it is possible to cut the (1) "cost of logistics operation" relating to the saleable items themselves such as goods, services, or information including money and knowledge and (2) "running and adjusting cost" spent for the logistics system itself. Further, the scope of application, performance, and quality in the individual business processes and management functions are shared and improved to the maximum level of the logistic elements.

[00100] Further, by upgrading the output performance and streamlining the framework and operation in the individual elements of all logistic systems, all of the companies or businesses and other economic entities connected to the MPLS 45 enjoy these merits in tandem. Further, in addition to the connection and disconnection between customers and economic entities, it is easy to set, modify, introduce, and discard elements such as functions, knowhow, software optimization tools, etc. Due to this, it is possible to deal with changes in the logistics environment agilely, flexibly, and accurately and increase customer satisfaction.

[00101] As explained above, according to the present invention, a logistics system is realized which solves the problems in past development, investment, and operation of the waste when viewing the economy as a whole and which can operate to satisfy both effectiveness and efficiency and agilely cope with changes in the environment.

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CLAIMS

1. A logistics system used for the flow of saleable items in an economy comprised of customers and economic entities,

5 said logistics system characterized by being constructed from

 a demand information layer which receives as input request information for saleable items from customers and generates integrated demand information for the economic entities using the request information,

10 a supply information layer which receives as input said integrated demand information and generates integrated supply information for economic entities making up a business process relating to the supply of the saleable items relating to the requests from the customers, and

20 an integrated transportation layer which receives as input said integrated supply information, generates integrated transportation information relating to the saleable items, and integratedly executes the physical transportation of the saleable items within the economy.

25 2. A logistics system used for the flow of saleable items in an economy comprised of customers and economic entities,

 said logistics system characterized by being provided with

30 a supply chain management system interposed between a demanding system converting requests issued from customers for saleable items to demand information and a supplying system converting said demand information to supply information and, on a single enterprize basis, managing the demanding system and supplying system and

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a transportation management system
interposed between a transporting system converting
said supply information to transportation information
and executing physical transportation of said saleable
items and the supplying system and, on a single
enterprise basis, managing the supplying system and
transporting system.

3. A logistics system as set forth in claim 2,
further provided with an integrated management system
for, on a single enterprise basis, managing the supply
chain management system and transportation management
system and optimizing the flow of saleable items.

4. A logistics system used for the flow of
saleable items in an economy comprised of customers
and economic entities,

said logistics system characterized by
forming a standardized integrated communication
platform in the economy and, on a single enterprise
basis, managing the customers and economic entities.

5. A logistics system as set forth in claim 4,
further provided with a process connection agent in
said integrated communication platform, said process
connection agent able connect the customers and
economic entities to enable the flow of information
relating to saleable items.

6. A logistics system as set forth in claim 5,
wherein said process connection agent has or connects

a supply chain management system
interposed between the demanding system converting a
request issued by a customer for saleable items to
demand information and a supplying system converting
the demand information to supply information and, on a
single enterprise basis, managing the demanding system
and the supplying system and

a transportation management system

interposed between the transporting system for
converting the supply information to transportation
information and executing the physical transportation
of the saleable items and the supplying system and, on
a single enterprize basis, managing the supplying
system and transporting system.

7. A logistics system as set forth in claim 6,
wherein said process connection agent has or connects
an integrated management system for, on a single
enterprize basis, managing the above supply chain
management system and the above transportation
management system and optimizing the flow of saleable
items.

8. A logistics system as set forth in claim 7,
wherein said integrated management system optimizes
the flow of saleable items for each business process.

9. A logistics system as set forth in claim 8,
wherein said business process forms at least one of a
sales plan control process, shipment projection
control process, transportation control process,
production control process, purchase control process,
incoming order control process, outgoing order control
process, inventory control process, delivery center
and warehouse control process, distribution processing
control process, shipping control process, cargo
information control process, ordered saleable item
information control process, product control process,
and sales performance control process.

10. A logistics system as set forth in claim 7,
wherein the integrated management system optimizes the
flow of saleable items for each economic entity.

11. A logistics system as set forth in claim 5,
wherein said customers and economic entities can
freely connect to said process connection agent and
can freely disconnect from said process connection

agent.

12. A logistics system as set forth in claim 5, wherein said process connection agent optimally connects said customers and economic entities by transferring information relating to saleable items via an electronic communications network.